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A NOTE ON PHORMIO

In *Phormio*, lines 354 to 356, we read:

- Ph. neque eius patrem se scire qui fuerit? Ge. negat.
Dem. ipsum esse opinor de quo agebam: sequimini.
[Ph. nec Stilphonem ipsum scire qui fuerit? Ge. negat.]
And a little lower down, lines 380 ff., we read:
Dem. quem amicum tuom ais fuisse istum, explana mihi,
et qui cognatum me sibi esse diceret.
Ph. proinde expiscare quasi non nosses. Dem. nossem?
Ph. ita.
Dem. ego me nego: tu qui ais redige in memoriam.
Ph. ehô tu, sobrinum tuom non noras? Dem. enicas.
dic nomen. Ph. nomen? Dem. maxume. quid nunc
taces?
Ph. perii, hercle, nomen perdidi. Dem. quid ais? Ph. Geta,
si meministi id quod olim dictumst, subice. hem,
non dico. quasi non nosses, temptatum advenis.
Dem. ego autem tempto? Ge. Stilpo. Ph. atque adeo quid
mea? Stilpost.

Bentley regarded the bracketed line as an interpolation because it repeats the content of line 354, and because the mention of the name Stilpo seems to be contradicted by the second passage quoted. Following Bentley, Fleckeisen, Dziatzko,¹ Ashmore, Elmer, Sargeaunt have rejected the line.²

It seems to me the line should be retained. Its rejection weakens most decidedly the comedy of the whole passage.

The situation is briefly as follows: In the absence of Demipho and his brother Chremes, Antipho, the son of the former, has fallen in love with and wishes to marry the orphan Phanium. Phormio proposes a plan whereby he himself shall go before the judges, make the claim that he knew the father of the girl,

¹ ad loc. V. 356 lässt sich weder mit V. 354 noch mit V. 386 vereinbaren und ist daher mit Recht von Bentley für unecht erklärt worden.

² And possibly others; I have had access only to the texts of those named.

assert that Antipho is a near relative of hers, and demand that in accordance with the law Antipho be forced to marry her. The plan is successfully carried out, and the marriage takes place. Demipho on his return is outraged. Accompanied by his advisers, he seeks an interview with Phormio. In the scene before us he is demanding of Phormio an explanation of the trumped-up relationship with Phanium. Geta is playing the double part of backing up Phormio while pretending to share Demipho's indignation.

Phormio, skillfully anticipating the old man, expresses astonishment that Demipho does not know who the father of the girl was. In these circumstances, the fact that the bracketed line is a repetition of the content of the second line preceding can hardly be taken as an argument for its rejection. Astonishment, especially pretended astonishment, most frequently expresses itself in repetition. Besides, not all of the line is repetition; it makes the very important addition of the name Stilpo.

On this point we may accept one of two hypotheses: either that Phormio is suggesting on the spur of the moment the first name that pops into his head, or that he is giving the name he had undoubtedly been called upon to give when he appeared before the judges. And it makes almost no difference at all which hypothesis we accept. The important thing to bear in mind is that in this line for the first time the name is given to the audience. It is perfectly obvious, it seems to me, that the comedy of the dialogue is inestimably heightened, if Phormio, when pressed by Demipho, forgets the name he has given just two minutes before, and if the audience has actually heard him give the name. The rejection of the line means the loss of both these elements of fun.

Moreover, it is expressly stated that the name has already been given: Phormio calls on Geta to prompt him *si meministi id quod olim dictumst* (v. 387). It is possible, of course, that this refers to some other occasion when Geta had heard the name, as, for example, before the judges. But it is more than doubtful whether that would "get over" to the audience. And if the

audience is not in possession of the name, the fun is certainly in large measure destroyed.

Zeunius makes the interesting comment on Bentley's rejection of the line: *Male. Nam mendax perturbatusque non semper memor est dictorum. Fere etiam ubi quis de rebus laborat, solent nomina fugere.*

The psychology of this observation is unquestionably correct, but I doubt if we are to assume that the whole of Phormio's speech is a lie. It is a very striking fact that the name here given by Phormio is the very same name as that assumed by Chremes on the occasions of his visits to his "other" wife in Lemnos (v. 740). Stilpo is actually the name Phanium knew her father by. Is it not likely that from the first Phormio knew the name of the girl's father? Donatus tells us whence he could have learned it: *Scire debemus hoc nomen non fictum a parasito, sed auditum a puella, quae uxor ducta sit, dici.* If this thought was in the poet's mind, the daring device of causing Phormio to forget the name in the dialogue in question is all the more interesting, although the poet may have been taking too much for granted in supposing that the audience could think quickly enough to appreciate it. But whether the audience could explain the source of Phormio's information or not, the fun of the passage depends mainly on the fact that Phormio himself gave the name and then straightway, within the next two minutes, forgot it again.

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